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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000325

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SUBJECT: TEACHERS' UNIONS SUSPEND STRIKE

REF: A. CONAKRY 0284

1B. CONAKRY 0303

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. As of Sunday, June 22, Guinea's teachers' unions (SLECG and FSPE) agreed to suspend a nationwide labor strike that began on June 19 (reftels). National exams, which were originally scheduled for the week of June 9 and then postponed to the week of June 23, are now scheduled for the week of June 30. The strike was peaceful. Although union leaders said they would not accept more promises from the GoG to meet their demands, that is essentially what they did. With a few exceptions, most of the agreement is to be implemented in September and October 2008, just when the new school year will be getting started. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) According to the negotiated agreement with the teachers' unions, the Government of Guinea has committed to address unions demands as follows:

Respect for the January 2007 Accords

13. (U) The unions initially demanded "scrupulous respect" for the January 2007 Accords, which was prompted by the appointment of Dr. Ahmed Tidiane Souare as the new prime minister at the end of May. According to union contacts, the Accords specifically state that former members of government cannot be appointed to the consensus government. However, in the text of the negotiated agreement, the unions denounced the GoG's lack of respect for the Accords, but said that because it is a complex point requiring further evaluation, it should be addressed later.

Hiring and Appointment of New Teachers

14. (U) The former Ministry of Education held national certification exams in 2007 in order to recruit additional teachers. When the unions called the strike, they demanded that those teachers that had passed the exams (approximately 600) be immediately hired and assigned to schools. Within the text of the negotiated agreements, the unions refer to several recent ministerial decrees regarding the hiring of new teachers, and stipulate that all of the hiring orders should be implemented by July 2008.

Replacement of Senior Education Officials

15. (U) Referring to an "aging and sedentary" group of bureaucratic officials occupying senior education positions, the unions demanded that such officials be replaced by

younger, more qualified educators. On this point, the unions recommend that a restructuring of the education bureaucracy and new civil service appointments be completed before the start of the new school year in October 2008.

PAYMENT OF SALARY ARREARS

¶6. (U) Teachers were supposedly granted a salary increase several months ago, which was based on an indexed scale, but never actually received the money. According to the negotiated agreement, the GoG must implement the increase by the end of June 2008. In addition, the GoG agrees to pay teachers (including those newly hired) three months worth of arrears in September 2008, and two months worth of arrears in October.

Payment of Miscellaneous Allowances

¶7. (U) The GoG reportedly provided the unions with copies of ten different ministerial decrees addressing miscellaneous allowance issues, including allowances for course preparation, insurance, licensing fees, etc. The unions call for these allowances to be implemented in stages: three allowances in July 2008, one in September 2008, and four in October 2008.

Conversion of Contractors

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¶8. (U) A recurring problem both for the teachers and the GoG is the issue of contract teachers. These teachers have been hired over the years with the promise of permanent employment that never materializes. They are generally paid less than regular teachers and have no guarantee of continued employment. The negotiated agreement calls for the GoG to convert 6000 contractors to permanent status between July 2008 and September 2008, and another 6808 contractors in October 2008. In addition, the GoG and the unions agreed to create a committee to oversee the conversion process.

Payment of Government Subsidy to the Teachers' Unions

¶9. (U) The unions demanded that the GoG begin paying an undetermined subsidy directly to the unions, which would be used for union operating expenses. According to the negotiated agreement, the unions have agreed to revisit this issue with the appropriate ministers in October 2008.

Doubling of Salaries (Including Pensions)

¶10. (U) The agreement states that the GoG and the unions agree that teachers' salaries should be increased, and that the issue will be addressed in the 2009 budget. To ensure that the budgeting happens, the agreement authorizes the establishment of two commissions, one to deal with budgeting issues, and the second to revise the national salary scale, which must be completed before October 2008. With respect to pensions, the unions expressed appreciation for the GoG's recent efforts to increase the salary base for pensions, and request that similar adjustments be made in 2008.

Resolution of Transportation Allowance

¶11. (U) Since the jump in fuel prices at the end of March, the teachers' unions have been demanding an increase in their transportation allowance. According to the negotiated agreement, the GoG has agreed to increase the transportation allowance to 144,000 GnF (\$32 - it was previously about \$5), beginning September 2008. In addition, the GoG has agreed to pay five months worth of allowance arrears in October 2008.

Implementation Committee

¶12. (U) In addition to the three commissions established earlier in the agreement to implement various aspects of the agreement, the GoG and the unions agreed to establish an oversight committee to ensure that the agreement is fully implemented.

Union Reactions

¶13. (SBU) Various union contacts seem to be reasonably satisfied with the agreement, but are waiting to see if the GoG upholds its end of the bargain. They say the immediate test is the payment of promised increases at the end of June. The Deputy Secretary General of SLECG, Elhadj Sy Savane, told Pol LES that everyone is waiting to see how the GoG implements the agreement. "We have to be vigilant in order to avoid previous traps," he said. (COMMENT. Before the strike got started, Savane told Poloff that the GoG has made many promises in the past, but that promises would not be enough to satisfy the unions this time around. END COMMENT).

COMMENT

¶14. (SBU) Union leaders have made it clear that they are looking for more than promises, but on first glance, it does not appear that they got much more than that. Much of the agreement promises payment of various allowances, arrears, and salary increases in September and October 2008. Most administrative changes are also promised for October 2008. The only immediate concession is the payment of basic salary increases next week, which the Minister of Finance told the G8 will not be an issue because the former Ministry of

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Education's budget is adequate to cover the additional expense. The new school year will start in October 2008, which suggests that the unions will be watching the GoG's response closely before deciding whether or not to return to work in the fall. END COMMENT.

CARTER